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# The Journal of Liberal Religion

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# The Journal of Liberal Religion

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*Friends of the JOURNAL will regret to learn that the Rev. Edward W. Ohrenstein has resigned his office as Business Manager. On behalf of the readers, the Editors extend to him hearty thanks for his indefatigable efforts in the interest of the JOURNAL during its first three years.*

*We welcome the Rev. Donald Harrington of the People's Liberal Church of Chicago, Illinois, as the new Business Manager. Readers of the JOURNAL will greatly assist him by renewing their subscriptions promptly and by soliciting new subscribers among their friends and acquaintances.*

## Individualism and the New England Tradition\*

PERRY MILLER

In the year 1641 the Colony of Massachusetts Bay, which for ten years had been enjoying a prosperity hitherto unprecedented in the annals of colonization, suddenly fell from the heights of economic well-being into the depths of depression. You and I encounter no difficulty in explaining the collapse of this colonial boom. No matter what religion we profess, we have all so partaken of the rationalism of the eighteenth century, the mechanism of the nineteenth and the materialism of the twentieth, that we unhesitatingly expound this economic crisis as a simple cause and effect. For ten years, we tell our students, the colony lived upon its immigrants; the immense flow of newcomers (relative to those already on the ground) provided a market for the stuffs raised or prepared by the previous settlers, and since the immigrants brought money with them, they supplied the indispensable specie. But in 1641 the Long Parliament had assembled and the Puritan cause at home seemed miraculously revived; whereupon the immigration to Massachusetts abruptly ceased. Immediately the settlers perceived that they no longer had a market for the few items they could wring from the New England soil, and without customers they could not procure the money which they must have if they were to import tools and clothes from London. What happened then is a commonplace of American economic history. Driven to finding a cash crop, the Puritans explored the deep and discovered the sacred cod; they carried fish to the West Indies and to the Papist countries of Southern Europe, to exchange their haul for the solid bullion with which they could purchase the necessary manufactures of England. This was a more complicated, not to say dangerous, way of making a living than they had foreseen during the first decade, but it was full of possibilities. By the eighteenth century the compulsion that had driven New England-

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\*An address delivered at the annual meeting of the Unitarian Ministerial Union, held at King's Chapel, Boston, May 18, 1942.

ers to the sea was no longer regarded as a misfortune; it had become the foundation of a commercial prosperity little short of fabulous.

Thus modern historians, who write for people like you and me, explain what happened in terms you and I think constitute explanation. If they belong to the school that holds the sum of economic wisdom to consist in the principles of rugged individualism and free competition, that contends that government interference in "business" is immoral, and that has been distressed by the policy of the national government in recent years, they often close their account with a hymn of praise to the solid virtues of the old Yankee stock, to its ingenuity and self-reliance, with the obvious implication that we should do well to forget the academic nonsense lately emanating from Washington and fight our way out of our economic troubles by imitating our ancestors. Now I come before you as one who also reveres his ancestors, and especially the founders of New England; up to a point at any rate, I am an admirer of the Puritans as well as their historian, and I should certainly feel chagrined, on this occasion, this Anniversary Week, which keeps alive the memory of the spring election and the annual election sermon, were I obliged to stand in this venerable pulpit and to confess that we are less than our forefathers. Before I will admit that we have so degenerated, I should like to examine for a moment the question of just how much the ancient Yankee individualism, just how much the economic and self-seeking man who made his own way without a security number, with no unemployment assurance, and assuredly with no reliance on the W.P.A., can be held the true explanation of the commercial triumph that so marvellously enriched Boston and Salem and made the name of the pious New Englander synonymous in many parts of the world with the skinflint, the horse-trader, and the peddler of wooden nutmegs. Let me assure you at once that I do not intend herein to attempt a discourse on economic history, for it is not the business cycle in which I am really interested. I am concerned about religious history, and above all, in this year of grace, about the state of religion, especially among the children of the Puritans. It was customary in the ordination sermons of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries for the preacher who delivered the charge to the newly consecrated youth to call upon him to maintain the pure

doctrine in matters of Faith, Practice, and Worship, but to close always with the supreme injunction, that he keep alive the "power" of religion. "Tho' these things are needful, and useful, and helpful, yea and honourable to Men, . . . yet the bare attending of these is too often made by men their Righteousness, and so becomes an abomination to God. Much less can that pass for Religion that spends itself about *Forms* and *Opinions* and *Parties*: These however strict and Orthodox they be, may be separable from the *Power of Godliness*; but Religion lies in Mens being Good, and doing Good." I am venturing to suggest that certain connotations which for us have come to cluster about the word individualism are in fact part of the reason why our religion is, as many confess it is, liable to the accusation of lacking somewhat of the ancient power of Godliness.

To return, then, to the depression of 1641. This is the way we expound it: cessation of the flow of immigrants produced a crisis; the crisis stimulated men to find a new crop; the sea supplied the crop and Catholic countries the market; the Puritans harvested the crop, sold it in the markets, and waxed rich. Then they built fine houses, had their portraits painted, sent their sons to Harvard College, and became Unitarians. It is as simple as that.

Simple though it be, I should like to put in a slight demur, that when we resort to such an explanation we make, generally without noticing their enormity, several staggering assumptions, which I am sure our ancestors themselves would hardly understand, or could they be made to understand, would angrily condemn. We assume that one physical fact causes another—cessation of immigrants a crisis, a crisis a new expenditure of energy; furthermore we assume that this particular chain of causes and effects is a segment of the continuous, unending sequence that has been operating forever and will operate forever, that one event will always produce something else, and it in turn a further something, and so on *ad infinitum*; finally, we take for granted that the whole business was haphazard and accidental. Had the Long Parliament not been called, immigrants would still have come; had the fish not happened to be there, the colony would have failed; had the Reformation crossed the Alps there would have been no fish-consuming Catholics to take the surplus cod. We praise the colonial Yankee for making the best of his opportunities—and in the very

act we confess by implication that the universe in which he throve and we live is mechanical, pointless, and contingent. Things are arranged in no logical or meaningful patterns, and men may treat the world as their oyster, since oysters are to be eaten by those who can find them and have the wit to open them.

There is some evidence in the Puritan writings—perhaps not as much as I might wish, but still I speak confidently out of my certainty of how the Puritan mind worked—that the men who actually fished the cod and first found their way in Yankee sloops to the West Indies, to Spain and Italy, did not think of what they were doing in precisely the terms we use in celebrating their achievement. To them, the sequence of cause and effect was quite opposite from what it is to us; they started not from the premise that they were to make the most of their opportunities, but that God had predetermined the prosperity of His people, for New England must prosper in order that the true form of church polity, the Congregational, might have a place in which to live; therefore, in order to provide the material basis necessary to the accomplishment of that end, God contrived in the infinitude of His providence that the superstitious Papists would continue to eat fish on Fridays; then he created the cod and put them in the Banks of Newfoundland to await the appointed time; then He planned the depression of 1641 so that the saints should be led by the stern hand of providential necessity to the fish; and that the necessity might come upon them only after they had survived the first hazards of settlement, He kept Charles I from calling the Long Parliament until ten years after Winthrop had brought settlers into the Bay. It was indeed part of God's plan that when the day came for His saints to go to work, they should work with a will, work hard and for long hours, that they should go down to the sea in small ships and encounter there the leviathan, the storm, and other evidence of His wrath. It was also part of His plan that most of the faithful laborers—a few, of course, would be cast away in order to show that He could do as He wished with His own—should receive the reward of pious labor in the form of gold and silver, and that they should then wear better garments than in the days of their poor beginnings and should give their children advantages they had not themselves possessed. But what I think we must endeavor thoroughly to understand is that for the prosper-

ing fisherman and merchant, this process was no mere exploitation of natural resources. It was part of a divine plan; it was the fulfilling of a design; it was the submission of the private self to the interests of the public. They fished and trafficked not for the increase of estates but for the glory of God and His churches.

I should perhaps confess that I dwell upon this episode because I have already found it a convenient way to bring home to Harvard students how differently they might look upon certain matters could they conceive the universe, not as free, open and indifferent, not as blind and inhuman, but as having some meaning. You will forgive me if I impose upon you an illustration I have frequently used in the classrooms, for I take it you are aware that one of the chief joys of exchanging pulpits is the chance you obtain of employing your pet devices on an audience not yet surfeited with them. The point, therefore, is that the Puritan universe was ruled, not by mechanical efficient causes, but by *the final cause*; it had significance, and a man in such a universe, by the very fact of his existence, had what I should like to call a moral responsibility. That was not something he might or might not take upon himself, it was inescapable, inherent. In this universe there was distress, anguish, loss of life, danger, torment, and in it every man had a job to do. But not for what he might get out of it—rather for what the job had to contribute to the pattern of the whole.

If the founders of Massachusetts thus conceived the universe itself, if for them the very structure of the cosmos was so contrived that men, by doing what they had to do, by exerting their wills and energies in their callings, simply performed their appointed rounds in the intelligent and intelligible purpose of God, then they naturally and inevitably conceived their churches in analogous terms. We can, of course, perceive the workings of the seventeenth-century mind more closely in the realm of ecclesiastical doctrine than in the economic, and especially in the theory of the Congregationalists, who, since they founded the vast majority of New England churches, really formulated the peculiar religious tradition of New England, into which King's Chapel, although founded by persons of an hostile persuasion, became gradually assimilated by a kind of obscure osmosis which visiting Anglicans from other regions still try vainly to comprehend. Both the found-

ers of King's Chapel and the Puritan founders of the First Church of Boston were Protestants, but the Puritans were the more vigorous protestors. They protested not only against Popes but against bishops, not only against superstition but against sacerdotalism, not only against Rome but against Lambeth and Whitehall. Now, we have all been told, time after time, that Protestantism enthroned the right of private judgment, that it required the individual to walk with God alone, though the encounter slay him; it said that in the Bible is the Word of God, which a man must read in the seclusion of his closet. It said he could not be saved by good works or by endowing masses, by offering flowers to the Virgin Mary or purchasing indulgences in the market-place; it put a man on his own, it made him a solitary, and it required him to find his own salvation within himself—or else to go to Hell. On the awful day of judgment each man will stand by himself, and the real judge of his fate will be not God or Christ, but his own single conscience:

*Now it comes in, and every sin unto Mens charge doth lay:  
It judgeth them, and doth condemn, though all the world  
say nay.*

*It so stingeth and tortureth, it worketh such distress,  
That each Man's self against himself, is forced to confess.*

Puritan individualism was in fact so drastic that Michael Wigglesworth—who appears in life to have been a gentle and kindly soul—had no scruple at proclaiming in the one literary work that all New Englanders read and re-read, that on the ultimate day the ties of even the most intimate affections would dissolve into callous indifference; the Day of Doom, as he portrayed it, became in effect rugged individualism run riot, what might be called an orgy of social irresponsibility. The regenerate brother sorrows not a jot over the condemnation of his reprobate twin, the godly wife sheds no tear over the fate of her erstwhile dear mate, and the adoring husband suddenly ceases to care about the wife who has become “a damn'd forsaken wight”; and even

*The tender Mother will own no other of all her numerous  
brood,*

*But such as stand at Christ's right hand acquitted through  
His Blood.*

One wonders, at times, why we should assume that only in the

nineteenth century, with the emergence of liberal Christianity and humanitarianism, of capitalism and laissez-faire, the idea of the disparate individual could come into being; the isolation of the self, the utter severance of both the saint and the sinner from his fellows, was so devastatingly set forth in the Puritan theology that by contrast a Channing, an Emerson, or a John D. Rockefeller seem downright socialists.

Hence the Protestant sense of the individual, of the single entity which is one entire person, who must do everything of himself, who is not to be cosseted or carried through life, who in the final analysis has no other responsibility but his own welfare, this ruthless individualism was indelibly stamped upon the tradition of New England. I think it does not require great ingenuity to trace the persistence of this concept through the many subsequent revolutions and modifications of theology, to see that it is indeed one of the unbroken threads of development from the days of Wigglesworth to this very Anniversary, to prove even that it is the principal ingredient in what I have ventured to call the New England tradition. In fact, the existence of this continuing idea justifies us in speaking of the New England tradition as something that has objective existence, and we can trace its effects both in the various theologies and in the equally various banks and counting-houses. Group by group the children of the Puritans ceased to believe in the phantasmagoric flares of *The Day of Doom*, but few of them ever doubted that nothing can force a man to confess but himself; in the Mathers, in Edwards, in Channing, in Emerson or in Henry Adams we can follow the workings of this principle, that in the supreme and crucial moments a man will be ruled only by his own conscience, "though all the world say nay."

That this Protestant individualism should have been kept so particularly alive in New England must in great part be attributed to the fact that from the beginning it was institutionalized in the Congregational polity. No matter how much the subsequent generations declined in zeal, or took their faith for granted, or came to doubt the infallibility of John Calvin, they had to live with churches to which no man could belong unless he voluntarily consented. There were attempts to infringe or to hedge the great idea; children who could not evoke enough will power to make a good profession might be kept within the easier confines of the

Half-Way Covenant—on the assumption that they were able to give half a consent! Sometimes the criteria of consent were so whittled down that the slightest stirring of an inclination would be treated as a full-fledged resolution, but still, in every crisis, the idea of the founders revived, and the New England churches could not, even when they tried, escape their inheritance. These churches were built, every one of them, upon a covenant, and the great point about a covenant is that nobody can sign one until he first makes up his mind to it. The Puritans of New England were consistent Protestants with a vengeance; men were not to be saved in batches and crowds, but one by one, through a special, inward reception of grace that enabled each particular individual to stand on his own feet and say, "I believe." Only such individuals could become members of a New England church, only those who actively wanted to be, and the very church itself had no corporate existence but as the sum total of the consents of particular members. The state could exile a heretic, imprison an Antinomian and hang a Quaker, but the mightiest theocrat in Massachusetts would never admit that the state could force an individual to become a church member. The churches could use their influence upon public morals, but no church could actually censure or excommunicate a sinner who had not previously submitted himself to the rule of the church. He who would eat of the cod had to go out and fish for it, and he who would feast in the fellowship of the saints had to knock upon the door. He had to take the initiative. That in order to muster such an initiative a man had first to receive the grace of God did not alter the fact that the responsibility was his, and the Puritan never saw any contradiction between his doctrine of predestination and the voluntarism of his church covenant. The important fact was that both in economics and in salvation, the individual had to do everything of himself. On earth there was no dole and in heaven there was no largess.

If during the last century, especially in the last ten years, there have been reasons why certain economists have sought a blessing from the founders of New England upon their particular opinions, there have for over a century been still greater incentives for many theologians. All the voluminous and bitter controversies of Protestant New England, even those that began before all the founders were dead, generated repeated though often conflicting

appeals to the example of the founders. But during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, all the groups that had descended from the New England Way were pretty much at one, whatever their other disagreements, in assuming that freedom was the supreme desideratum in this life and that the rights of the individual were sacred above all other claims. They were part of an expanding, capitalist, exploiting America, and we should not wonder that they identified the ethics of that America with Christianity, and that one and all they celebrated the founders of New England for being the pioneers of liberty, political, economic, and religious. How many times, in how many pulpits and on how many bedraped platforms, on how many centenaries, Anniversary Weeks, and Fourths of July, have Winthrop and Cotton and their colleagues been hailed as the progenitors of those virtues which have made Yankees the best, or at least the smartest, business men in America and the freest churchmen in all Christendom. True, Winthrop and Cotton misguidedly exiled Roger Williams, but they also left us the precious principle, enshrined in the very constitution of our churches, that no man need belong to anything unless he is willing—that he has the right, as Robert Frost likes to put it, to go to Hell in his own way. If they did unfortunately resort to compulsion when they confronted an occasional and especially obstreperous Quaker, or if they did quickly learn to scalp more Indians than could scalp them, nevertheless they dowered us with the principle of consent. Out of that principle has grown the whole American code: freedom, private judgment, liberalism, democracy, the due process of law—above all that individualism which both in the religious and economic life came in the nineteenth century to be the cardinal tenet.

My reason for beginning with economics rather than theology may at this point become a little clearer than I fear it has been so far. I think that an analogous misunderstanding of the original theory of Congregationalism has, over the centuries, insensibly grown up among the churches that divided the inheritance of the Puritan. This misunderstanding was perfectly natural under the circumstances, and it was eminently plausible, because in fact it was not so much a misunderstanding as an emphasis upon one part of the original theory to the neglect of what had been, at the beginning, an equally important other part. Yet all these considerations

do not wholly excuse the New England churches, or their leaders, for having let something go which was once a source of strength to New Englanders and which, were it with us today, might enable us to meet our problems head-on with the resolution that so distinguished both the Puritan saint and sailor. That something which it seems to me we have so nearly and so tragically lost was in religion the same something that in economics made the life of the Puritan merchant such a different business from the life of the twentieth-century capitalist. At the grave risk of oversimplifying my point, let me put it bluntly: for the founders of New England there was a purpose in the world; they called it the purpose of God, but we need not be put off by hackneyed terminology, for in the actual, every-day life of ordinary men, the great idea that this universe was no accident and that it was constantly directed by providence to intelligible ends was an ever present reality, though the language in which we attempt to expound it to modern ears is apt to sound archaic. Consequently, for the founders of New England, the free man was he who could bring himself heart and soul to accept and submit to that which God had decreed would come to pass whether he submitted or not. When the regenerated man consented to the church covenant, the important point was not that he had consented, but what he had consented *to*. Liberal historians have praised the New England churches because they did not require men to subscribe a particular creed; in the seventeenth century it did not occur to Puritans that saints should subscribe a creed, because there was only one truth that a saint could possibly entertain anyway. The liberty of the Christian man, like the liberty of the economic man, was to be exercised, as John Winthrop succinctly put it, "in a way of subjection to authority." We chose, and if we chose rightly, we were saved, but if we chose wrongly, we went to eternal torment. In Protestantism there was indeed the right of private judgment, but only one judgment was right; if the private individual missed it, the exercise of his freedom, the sovereign prerogative of his individuality, led him to destruction. There was freedom—but the freedom, to quote Winthrop once more, to do only that which was good, just, and honest. God led the Puritans through His providence down to the sea and to prosperity, but in His revealed word He also taught them, as John Cotton was obliged to explain to the

profiteering merchants of Boston, that it is impious and wrong to maintain "That a man might sell as dear as he can, and buy as cheap as he can." In the mart of trade there existed a just price, to which bargainers must come, will-they nill-they, and in the temple there was a truth, a core of belief, authoritative and single, to which Christians must consent, no matter what their individual tastes or preferences.

It is worth remarking again, though many have remarked it before, that this one authoritative truth was a grim doctrine that cannot be accused of palliating or concealing the harsher realities of life. Of course in many quarters, especially in this particular quarter, the doctrine has for over a century been copiously accused of being altogether too harsh, and the "moral argument against Calvinism" has proved so cogent that Calvinists themselves have for a century been steadily yielding to it. Obviously it would be the height of folly for me to come at this late date before the Unitarian Ministerial Union with the intention of reconverting it to Calvinism, for nobody, least of all I, can any longer take seriously the comic, the grotesque eschatology of *The Day of Doom*. But this much I think we must be prepared to recognize, though the recognition be unpleasant and difficult: within the forms of this theology the more terrible moments of human life—the ravages of disease, the pains of child-birth, the tomahawk, and the foundering vessel—could be presented to ordinary men as belonging in the scheme of things, as having a reason for being. Say if you will that this theology was naive and unscientific, but whatever its many shortcomings, it did not leave individuals unequipped, with no other resources but themselves, to meet the onslaught of war, of death, of tyrants. When the free man took his place in the ranks of the Christians, when he took up his calling, he went forth to do battle with evil; he did not content himself with expatiating on the beauties of a world in which men were indulged with the freedom of choice, nor did he stop short with the act of choosing as though it were the end-all and be-all of creation.

To survey the history of theology in New England, from the middle of the seventeenth century down to our own time, is to behold one of the most fascinating spectacles in the whole panorama of history. It is to watch the unfolding of a game in which

the luxury of choosing ceased to be a condition of the play and became the reward itself. The history of the New England tradition is a series of splinterings, of divisions and sub-divisions and the sub-division of sub-divisions, until you are left breathless as you try to keep pace with the accelerating pace of Yankee individualism. No sooner had Calvinists and Arminians split than the Calvinists separated into New Lights and Old Lights, and the New Lights had no sooner come into being than they were dispersed into the schools of exercise and taste, into Hopkinsians and Bellamyites, into the camps of Taylor and Tyler and Bushnell, and at last one is ready to perceive that, as far as the "orthodox" side is concerned, the constitution of Andover Seminary was the perfect symbol of their state of mind, wherein the faculty was obliged to swear to so many quirks and eccentricities of doctrine that nobody could tell what anybody was supposed to believe or what after all was orthodoxy. But the story on the "liberal" side is no more reassuring: the so-called Arminians divided into Universalists and Unitarians, and the Unitarians were so fearful of dividing among themselves that for a long time they refused to say what, if anything, they stood for. But even such circumspection was not enough to inhibit the splintering of Unitarians, and individual Unitarians, exercising still further the right of private judgment, had to be denounced by Andrews Norton for propagating "the latest form of infidelity," though it might well seem to a Calvinist like Lyman Beecher, who also had a sense of humor, that Norton was piqued merely because his own doctrine had so soon ceased to be the last word in heresy. Where beyond Emerson and Theodore Parker could the tradition of New England individualism go? Where indeed, but either to Walden Pond or into Big Business. Was it not a straight line, was it not the *great* line, that led from Wigglesworth's *Day of Doom*, wherein each man's conscience proved at last his final judge, to the Babel of sects that became the religious life of nineteenth-century New England? Was it not a proper fulfillment of the New England tradition, that having commenced with the assertion that a man's own conscience was his guide, "though all the world say nay," its greatest literary prophet should deliver as its ultimate injunction, "Whoso would be a man must be a nonconformist," and its finest stylist should declare, "Wherever I go, men pursue me and paw me with their

dirty institutions," intending to include among the dirty institutions even the freely covenanted church of Concord? Yes, this persistent, this envigorating individualism is the heart and soul of the New England tradition. This is what we are and what we have been. But how did it happen, the timid historian has all this while been wanting to put it—and only in the present serious juncture has he found the courage to speak up—that while the right of private judgment thus flourished like the green-bay tree, John Cotton's admonition to Robert Keayne, that he should not sell as dear as the traffic would bear or buy as cheap as he could force men's necessities to yield, got transformed into the maxim, "The public be damned"?

I have often wondered if perhaps the major tragedy in New England history was not the peculiar circumstances under which the liberal movement was obliged, in the middle of the eighteenth century, to get under way, the extreme caution and diffidence with which it only reluctantly merged into the open as the Unitarian Association of 1825. Of course, when one remembers the temper of New England in those years, one can hardly blame the liberal leaders for seeking to avoid controversy, for working behind the scenes, for not giving their opponents a chance to get at them. By that time all New Englanders had become proficients at the game of cat and mouse; I say "game" advisedly, because it is all too obvious that they enjoyed it immensely. Every parson was perpetually crouched to jump upon his brethren, even his closest friends or classmates, at the first sign of heresy, and the sport of denunciation, hair-splitting, and mutual recrimination had come so to absorb the energies of New England thinkers that they had few left over for the thinking itself. The Unitarians, to tell the truth, were getting bored with this provincial pastime; as they discovered larger and more genial views, became men of a more worldly breeding, travelled in Europe and learned to read poetry, they longed to cultivate other graces than the *odium theologicum*. So they worked as quietly as possible, and preferred to ignore the disagreeable rather than to flatter it by admitting its existence. I believe it was Chandler Robbins, was it not? who modestly boasted in 1866 that in his church throughout the Civil War he had never, in sermon, prayer or hymn, permitted to appear the slightest overt suggestion that the nation was at war. It was natural that the

opponents of Unitarianism, who in the first decades of the century were having a wonderful time lambasting each other, were thrown into paroxysms of rage over this refusal to abide by the traditional rules, at this supercilious disdain of joining the free-for-all and contributing to the common delectation. Not merely Calvinists in New England were exasperated by what seemed the excessive prudence of the Unitarians; William Hazlitt, whose father was a fighting champion of English Unitarianism and had spent two rather unhappy years in Boston, fulminated over a volume of Channing's sermons that he had never seen anything more guarded, more suspended between heaven and earth. Channing, he said, "keeps an eye on both worlds; kisses hands to the reading public all round; and does his best to stand well with different sects and parties. He is always in advance of the line, in an amiable and imposing attitude, but never far from succor." Lyman Beecher had more reason to be enraged at what he was bound to call the hypocrisy and deceit of the Unitarians. From the time their blasphemy began to show itself, he declared, "it was as fire in my bones," but these damnable subtle heretics would not come out and fight like men. "Their power of corrupting the youth of the commonwealth by means of Cambridge is silently putting sentinels in all the churches, legislators in the hall, and judges on the bench, and scattering every where physicians, lawyers, and merchants." Like a species of fifth-columnists, as Beecher would have called them had he known the phrase, they wait until the good old minister dies, and then they install a bright young sophisticate from Harvard "and take house, funds, and all." "It is time," he thundered in 1821, "high time to awake out of sleep, and to call things by their right names."

However, by that time it was clear even to the most prudent that silence was no longer in order. In 1815 Channing had appeared in print, in the letter to Thacher and the two letters to Dr. Worcester, to defend the Unitarians publicly against the charge of concealing their real opinions. We know that he was not the kind of man to stoop to such a melodramatic and absurd "plot" as the lurid imagination of Beecher envisaged, and Hazlitt's strictures cannot in any sense be considered a just comment upon the Baltimore sermon, one of the most forthright, clean-cut utterances in all American history, which ought to have convinced even

Lyman Beecher that a Unitarian could call things by their right names. And eleven years afterwards he delivered the election sermon—the old Puritan custom was still observed in 1830—and there pronounced certain words which it is a pleasure to repeat after him on this Anniversary above all others:

I call that mind free, which jealously guards its intellectual rights and power, which calls no man master, which does not content itself with a passive or hereditary faith, which opens itself to light whencesoever it may come, which receives new truth as an angel from heaven, which, whilst consulting with others, inquires still more of the oracle within itself, and uses construction from abroad, not to supersede but to exalt and quicken its own energies.

One would think that Lyman Beecher might have perceived that Channing was not so great a traitor to Puritanism, that his being a Socinian was of less import than that he, in his own fashion, was saying with *The Day of Doom* that the private man's inward oracle must be his only judge and condemner, though all the world say nay.

But why, you may well ask, do I then characterize the long period of incubation, of the fastidious reticence which enabled Unitarianism to take shape, why do I call it "tragic" if at last, however surreptitious the methods, it finally produced such stirring statements in 1819 and 1830—statements which I obviously admire? I should prefer, lest you think I am merely riding some private hobby-horse—for I too am an heir of the Yankee tradition and idolize my own eccentricities—to let speak for me certain persons who knew at first hand the state of mind that followed in Unitarian circles hard upon Channing's magnificent work of liberation. No doubt my witnesses are prejudiced, since they are as cranky a pair as may well be adduced in a long history of oddities. Nevertheless, a few years after Channing had told the General Court that that mind is free which jealously guards its intellectual rights and powers, Emerson brought down upon his head the wrath of many Unitarians—they reserved their unper- turbed serenity in the presence of a rustic boor like Beecher, but they betrayed that they had their share of the Yankee irascibility when they confronted this heretic grown up in their own ranks—by telling young men at Harvard: "I have heard it said that the clergy—who are always more universally than any other class,

the scholars of their day—are addressed as women; that the rough spontaneous conversation of men they do not hear, but only a mincing and diluted speech." And then there is the well-known passage from Henry Adams, describing a boyhood passed in circles where the principles of Channing, the freedom which consists in jealously guarding one's own rights and powers and in consulting the inward oracle before all others, had come entirely to prevail:

The religious instinct had vanished, and could not be revived, although one made in later life many efforts to recover it. That the most powerful emotion of man, next to the sexual, should disappear, might be a personal defect of his own; but that the most intelligent society, led by the most intelligent clergy, in the most moral conditions he ever knew, should have solved all the problems of the universe so thoroughly as to have quite ceased making itself anxious about past or future, and should have persuaded itself that all the problems which had convulsed human thought from earliest recorded time, were not worth discussing, seemed to him the most curious social phenomenon he had to account for in a long life.

Allow what you will for Emerson's hyperbole and Adams' dyspepsia, still Channing himself in 1815 had made, along with his vigorous assertion, an admission that goes far to bear out both Emerson and Adams. He objected to Dr. Worcester that the method sometimes employed by the Calvinists for driving Unitarians out of the churches, the trial for heresy, was actually inconsistent with the principles of Congregational polity, because in order to condemn a member for heresy in a Congregational church, the whole body must pass judgment; but, said Channing, if the whole church is to judge an intricate point of theology, then the people must be so skilled as to know what is right and what is wrong, yet nowadays, as is obvious, the people are so engaged in active business that they have no time to devote to these curiosities. Hence, Channing argued, they easily become the tool of a domineering minister, and so it would be better, all things considered, that nobody ever be tried for heresy. In other words, out of the long period of stealthy preparation and cautious growth came the liberal Christianity in whose name we assemble today; but under the circumstances of its emergence, compelled as it was

to walk softly and forego doctrinal discussion, it came in the end to take its stand firmly within the sacred preserves of the private judgment, to emphasize as its primary teaching the right of the individual to go his own gait, to guard his powers, to be jealous above all of the inward oracle. It vindicated man's right to choose, as Puritanism had vindicated man's right to choose or reject the covenant; but the question is, after it had so placed its emphasis and had parted company with "orthodoxy," when it had become a church with no set creed, with no doctrinal stereotypes to intrude upon the individual jealousy, after it had made men free to choose, what did it leave for them to choose?

Mr. Mark Anthony DeWolfe Howe tells in his delightful *Venture in Remembrance* of standing with Henry James at the head of Marlborough Street and of James's saying, in his slow, elephantine hesitations, "Do you feel that Marlborough Street . . . is precisely . . . *passionate*?" Henry James was not, at that time, being unduly disparaging; he was a mild critic of Boston, but his love for the city flowed into the affectionate cadences of *The American Scene*, and no one better understood than he that if Marlborough Street was not precisely *passionate*, it was spacious, civilized, and jealous of its own integrity. But I have recently had occasion to re-read a letter he wrote some time after this observation to Mr. Howe, in August of 1914. The letter makes, to me, even more poignant reading than ever before, if only because what he perceived in 1914 is really much more patent today, and if only because what he did see in 1914 so many of us contrived to blind ourselves to for another twenty-seven years. He who had been, no one more so, very much at home in a world of liberal elegance and civilization, suddenly recognized in August, 1914, that he had been all his life deceived by appearances. "That above all," he wrote, "is the strange stranded feeling—the disconnection in everything by which we have during all the period of my long life, and long before that still, supposed ourselves to be living. I say supposed ourselves, because the most dreadful effect of it all is to make the past which we believed in as a growth of civilization and a storing-up, despite everything, of some substantial treasure, take on the semblance of a most awful fraud, a plausible villainy that all the while was meaning and intending and leading to this horror—had it all the while, so to speak, up

its sleeve." My mood today is, I believe, somewhat like James's in 1914. Again let me say, I am not intending to preach Unitarians back into Calvinism, but I think I am not alone in feeling that however legitimately and rightly our culture has developed over the last three centuries, certain elements in our tradition, those which have gone for freedom, for private judgment, for doing what one will, all those which we may lump together under the rubric of "individualism," have been developed at the expense of certain other elements that once were equally a part of our tradition. There was, as we have remarked, a powerful sense of the individual and of his spiritual freedom in Puritanism, and it has correctly been praised as supplying the New England peoples with the vitality, the drive, that made them what they have become; but that freedom, that individualism which for many generations we have celebrated as though it were the whole story, once had sanctions which we have almost forgotten, and they were, by our more sensitive standards, harsh, grim, and rigorous. The individual had to work out his destiny, not in a world of comfort or of margin, not of security, but in a world where sin and death and strife were always upon him. If a man would be a Christian, he had not only to choose the church covenant, but to take up arms against the Devil, who was no mere figure of speech. The individual could be free only *for* ends not *from* ends, and his liberty was achieved only upon terms. I do not need to dwell upon the plight of the world or the nation today. Certainly the creed of Channing is being, to say the least, challenged; the position of the liberal Christian, to call him still by his nineteenth-century title, is becoming uncomfortable. Is it, we must ask, tenable? That it is quite enough to be free, that it is enough to guard one's intellectual rights and powers and to consult the inward oracle, is not so clear as it once was, and there is, furthermore, the ugly suspicion growing and growing, that all the time we were preaching the freedom that would call no man master, something else was at work which we did not suspect, some plausible villainy that all the while was meaning and intending this present horror. The optimistic assumptions, which have for generations supported the growing liberalization of the Puritan tradition, have in the last two decades been subjected to a devastating analysis by the most sensitive of our poets and the profoundest of our novelists; our

philosophers have been challenged by psychologists, physicists, and biologists to make good the claims they have been so long advancing for the inherent dignity of man, and now two or three dictators and several thousand bombardiers have brought the challenge directly home to us, where face it we must.

But I have sadly mismanaged my statement if I leave you with the impression that I am preaching despair. I am trying, haltingly and with some embarrassment, to say that we do have resources, though not perhaps of the sort which Channing had in mind, not so much in ourselves as in our past, in Protestantism and above all in *our* Protestantism. If it is no longer enough merely to be free, but if we must say for *what* we intend to be free, then like the Puritans we shall devote ourselves to formulating anew the ends of existence. If in order to make those ends prevail we may be required to curtail our freedom, to surrender some of the more exalted pretensions which we have ignorantly and foolishly adopted, then again like the Puritans, who after a conviction of sin looked with scorn upon their formerly untroubled arrogance, we too shall put our chastened wills to the service of something that all along has been, and still is, greater than we are.

## Faith and Finality

LAURENCE SEARS

To one working in the field of philosophy the apparent lack of concern on the part of modern theologians with the problem of knowledge is disconcerting. That has not always been the case. In the great periods of theological speculation, men recognized the necessity of justifying their statements with a consistent epistemology. That ought to be done anew in each age, and the present is no exception.

How fully are we justified in claiming finality for Christianity? In trying to answer that question it is necessary to start with an historical survey of the changing concepts of knowledge with reference to the possibility of finality, testing thereby the claims of religion in general and Christianity in particular to give absolute knowledge.

It is apparent that theories of knowledge and of nature are so closely integrated that they cannot be separated. When we turn to the Greek ideal of nature we find a distinction between that changing aspect which they called *physis*, and the underlying reality which was permanent. The important thing to note is that whether we are dealing with atoms of Democritus or the ideas of Plato, reality did not belong to the realm of the transient. Knowledge as opposed to opinion was an understanding or grasping of these finalities. Since whatever changed was not genuine being, any knowledge of that aspect of the world was not genuine knowledge. Opinion was concerned with the changing world of the senses, knowledge with the immediate apprehension or vision of the permanent.

One further assumption needs to be noted. The human knower was considered capable of seeing and recognizing his finality. Believing that man's ideas were genuine copies of reality it was then assumed that reality was of such a nature that it partook of the essence of ideas.

The medievalists operated within a similar framework. There was the same passion for finality, emphasized, indeed, since sal-

vation depended upon absolute truth. "Shall a man be uncertain of his salvation?" There was the same distinction between reality and appearance, the one transient, the other permanent. There was, however, decidedly less belief in the power of natural reason to reach its goal of knowledge. The old Greek faith in mind was gone, and in its place was put revelation as the necessary adjunct.

Involved in this position were three assumptions; that reason and revelation never contradict since both come from God; that man, though fallible, may receive infallible truth; and, finally, that the ultimate purpose of knowing the truth is to contemplate God's wisdom and perfection.

With the growth of modern science there was a gradual shift in method. The first step, which marked no sharp break with what had preceded, was the development of mathematical rationalism. This took the position that the universe is mathematical in structure, and that the truth about it could be reached by deduction with little or no place for empirical verification. Reason and not the senses was to be trusted. But Copernicus, who exemplified so fully his faith, was followed by Tycho Brahe whose primary significance lay in his insistence that calculation must be verified by observation. This was the opening wedge which was driven in more deeply with each generation, until we find in Newton a scientist who was as much of an empiricist as he was a mathematician. He insisted that even the laws of nature on which they based their science should be regarded as tentative since new facts were always coming in.

There were several aspects of this shift in method that need to be made explicit. In the first place, without their being altogether conscious of the fact, the human scene was gaining in importance. More and more it was man's fate and man's interests which were coming to the forefront. Paradoxically, when the Copernican revolution swept man's earth from the central position in the universe it made that earth far more important to him.

In the second place, the universe was slowly becoming less static and more dynamic as reality was expressed in terms of energy. Though it was not by any means yet the world of the evolutionists, neither was it the world of Plato or Aquinas. Thirdly, reason was occupying a far larger place than it had when men depended largely upon revelation for ultimate truth, and this

reason was depending much less upon *a priori* principles than it was upon empirical data. The senses were becoming the ultimate source of verification.

But as one studies the growth of this new method a remarkable fact emerges; a new method was being used in an attempt to reach the *old goal* of absolute knowledge. John Locke is the outstanding illustration of the results of this paradox. He started with the insistence that man has no knowledge save that which comes from experience, and the senses are the only means of entrance for the data of knowledge. But, and here we turn to the past, ideas were for him what they had been previously—copies of reality. From the sense data man builds up his ideas, *and these ideas are all he ever knows*. He does not know or experience the world; he knows and experiences ideas, and since he has only the latter, by no possibility can he compare them with the originals to know whether or not they are accurate. Hence he is imprisoned within the mind, not knowing whether his ideas are genuine pictures of the world or not, or even whether the world exists. So Locke who had started with such vast faith in the possibilities of this new knowledge ends with the pathetic admission that man can at best have only probable knowledge. He should have added that he could have no assurance that he could have *any* knowledge.

All of this is by way of illustrating the fact that scientists and philosophers were trying to discover a kind of knowledge which had been the logical outgrowth of other methods, those of non-empirical rationalism and of revelation. They were trying to use a new instrument to achieve the old results. As Randall says: "Their ideal was still a *system of revelation*, though they had abandoned the method of revelation." There was still the search for finality long after the only methods by which it might be reached were given up. It might be achieved by dependence upon a rational *a priori* or revelation; men were slow in coming to the realization that it could *not* be found by the senses.

One more step remains to be taken before the main outline of the scientific method as we know it was completed, and that came with the formulation of the theory of evolution. The medieval metaphysics could have been summed up in the phrase: "In the beginning was the Word." That is, prior to any physical manifestation was the eternal pattern, the unchanging form which

was to dominate and control all the passing phenomena. "The One remains, the Many change and pass." But that could not be a just characterization of any genuinely evolving universe. One holding that belief could only say: "In the beginning was the process." No longer are there any of the old finalities to be grasped.

The other important implication of the theory of evolution lay in the explicit repudiation of the old interpretation of man. He had never been considered a thorough-going part of the process. Just because he did belong fundamentally to the realm of being rather than of becoming he could share in the attribute of deity, and know in some final sense the beautiful and good.

There had been four assumptions of the older theory. The method of gaining knowledge had included either the intuition of *a priori* principles or the reception of divine revelation. It had shown behind the changing phenomena a static world of being. Man, as knower, was regarded as capable of gaining absolute truth. And lastly, the goal was finality. One by one these assumptions gave way to others. Rationalism and revelation were replaced by empiricism and experimentalism. The realm of being was absorbed by a world of becoming. Man became a thorough-going part of the process—one with all living creatures. And at last finality gave way to a far more modest search for that kind of understanding which would illuminate man's path.

It is necessary to make more explicit the implications of what seem to be a modern theory of knowledge, and then we can turn specifically to the field of the philosophy of history. From the many who might be chosen I have taken two contemporary writers, Karl Mannheim, a sociologist, and P. W. Bridgman, a physicist.

Mannheim, in his *Ideology and Utopia*, starts with the problem as to where we get our norms of interpretation and understanding. He repudiates the notion that they are to be found through a contemplation of the facts of nature. And with equal vigor he rejects the theory that there are spheres of thought in which it is possible to find absolute truth existing independently of the values and position of the one who is observing, and unrelated to his social context. In fact, it is just those values and interests which give direction to any search for knowledge. They are the forces

which focus our attention. Furthermore, it is our interests and impulses which control the selection of those aspects of reality with which our thought is concerned.

In a sense, of course, this is a limitation; not all facts can possibly be included in any synthesis. But this recognition of interests is also freeing since without them there could be no knowledge at all. "It is precisely the purposes that a man has that give him his vision." Obviously, any definition of truth emerging from such assumptions would not be in terms of an undistorted picture of objective reality. Knowledge is not the passive contemplation of beauty established in some stainless shrine; it is critical self-examination. There is a clear recognition that we all inevitably operate within a framework of emotions, impulses, needs, institutions, and traditions. There is no possibility of getting outside of some such frame of reference, but there is the hope that by recognizing it and trying to operate within an ever larger and more inclusive one we may minimize the limitations and grow in wisdom.

It is not surprising that Mannheim's test of truth is essentially pragmatic. Concepts are true, not insofar as they are exact copies but to the extent that they help man meet his specific problems. A concept is rather like a signboard—if by following it we arrive at our destination it is true. It follows that no mere scrutiny of our concepts or signboards—is adequate, no matter how critically it may be done. It is only through action that man finds out whether he is moving in the right direction, that he tests his ideas. Through action we address questions to a situation, and the answers are always in terms of the success or failure of the action involved. Theory and action are not torn from the larger context for it is theory which gives direction to action, and action which is the final test of the theory.

When we turn for the application of this theory to a philosophy of history we find again his insistence that man is directed by his interests and by the social setting in which he lives. How one interprets history depends upon the position one occupies in society. But he repeats that this is not simply a source of error; it is often the source of one's keenest, truest, insights.

It is clear that such a procedure could give no final, absolute historical truths. Since the act of knowing is not a vision of eternal truths, but a process of dealing with life situations on the part

of creatures living under certain conditions, the results reveal the limitations. Historical knowledge becomes a way by which we in the present use our interests to give direction to a study of the past, and then in turn use the past to illuminate the future. This may not give man the detachment and objectivity of deity. In fact the search for that kind of objectivity becomes a futile thing, reminding one of James Harvey Robinson's dictum "that what is called objective history is simply history without an object."

By way of comparison and contrast I want to turn to another expression of the modern scientific method, this time the work of a physicist. The operational method of P. W. Bridgman is well known. Throughout his analysis there is a thorough-going rejection of the Greek and medieval epistemologies and an acceptance of the modern scientific assumptions and procedure.

Although Professor Bridgman is a mathematician, he is a thorough-going empiricist. He recognizes no *a priori* principles which would in any way limit the possibilities of new experience since he is convinced that we must expect to meet new situations continually. He summarizes this empiricism succinctly when he says: "Experience is determined only by experience." His empiricism, however, is a very different thing from most historical expressions of it. He has broken with the tradition which lasted throughout the history of British empiricism which made concepts mere mirrors in which to reflect reality in as undistorted a fashion as possible, and he has thereby avoided the major difficulty of Locke who knew only experience, and not the world through experience.

In other words he does not define concepts in terms of the properties which a thing has. Referring to the older interpretation he says: "In general, we mean by any concept nothing more than a set of operations; the concept is synonymous with the corresponding set of operations." To give an illustration, the concept of a table is determined to the extent that all conceivable operations and uses have been explored. For Locke the idea of a table, and it was only the *idea* of a table that he knew, was composed of the ideas of the table's properties, and the hope was that the idea was an exact copy. Bridgman, however, has no expectation of reaching the thing in itself unmodified by the series of operations and explorations. It is in that sense that the concept table and the

ensuing operations are so functionally related as to be inseparable. All concepts are framed, not as copies of some external object, but with reference to some intended future issue which will then require a new formulation of the concept.

It follows, of course, that since operations are the means by which meanings originate, function, and are tested, the meaning of any term can only be found by observing "what a man does with it, not by what he says about it." The only proof of the pudding lies in the eating of it, and at that point both pudding and idea become modified. With Bridgman as with Mannheim, action becomes the means by which the concept is both formulated and proved. Since ideas are framed with reference to future consequences it follows that the difference between concepts is located only as we find what differences in our procedure our differences make.

On such a basis it is clear that no knowledge can be final or absolute. Relativity becomes obvious if the operational method is accepted. Experience is explored and described in terms of concepts, and since those concepts are constructed of operations all our knowledge must be relative to the operations which are selected. Historical knowledge, then, is the result of a series of operations selected by virtue of the particular interests of the historian.

Neither Mannheim nor Bridgman could be charged with the attempt to reveal the inner secret of anything. For both, the individual not only never transcends his interests; it is by virtue of them that his activities are directed. All knowledge is directed to the solving of human problems and the meeting of human needs. The method of each is completely empirical in its dependence upon experience and its rejection of all intuitions or revelations which have not been experimentally verified. For each, truth is a characteristic of a proposition formulated to achieve the solution to a problem, and it must be tested by its results. And finally, neither has any expectation or desire of getting that kind of final, absolute knowledge which both Greek and medievalist desired. Both the method and the *goal* of knowledge have been changed.

Before making an application to the specific issues in question it is necessary to be more detailed about the method of scientific analysis. There seem to be four steps involved. In the first place

the problem to be faced must be stated clearly. Though this condition is not always observed it would seem too obvious to need elaboration.

The second step is the most difficult and the most important. Every analysis proceeds through the use of concepts, and they have to be divined in such terms that they will be useful in the succeeding stages, or to use Bridgman's phrase, in terms of the operations to be performed. Until this is done the instruments of exploration are dull and uncertain. Many confusions are clarified and controversies put where they can be fruitfully considered when this is done. For when the terms are not only precise, but formulated in such a fashion that they can be tested in action the problem is capable of being solved.

The beginning of all wisdom lies in the refusal to accept any concept or belief until after the question has been asked and answered: "What would it mean to accept this? What would it mean in terms of the consequent behavior and resulting procedure?" Apart from our expectations regarding them, no ideas or concepts hold meaning. Only when they are stated in prospective terms at the beginning of the examination is a satisfactory solution possible.

The last two steps can be put briefly. After the terms have been fruitfully defined, a proposition or hypothesis is formulated which is susceptible of being proved or disproved by available evidence. The assumption here is that nothing new can be learned through the analysis of propositions and definitions except and in so far as they are submitted to empirical verification. Finally, the experiment is performed and the hypothesis declared true or false depending on whether or not the original problem has been solved.

Throughout this process there must be a clear realization of the necessary connection between belief and action. Where that is not recognized beliefs and concepts are left purely verbal in character, and action has been deprived of rational direction. This is equally true in the areas which are not included in the laboratory sciences.

"Patriotism," says one, "is the supreme virtue." "Patriotism," says another, "is the last refuge of the scoundrel." Until the word "patriotism" is defined in terms of what it means, means in the consequent behavior of the men so characterized, the controversy

is only about a word. After the term has been defined so that there may be a prospective reference the discussion becomes meaningful since then an examination can be made to determine the results of the respective definitions.

This warning seems particularly needed in religious groups. Historically, there has been a drastic separation between belief and behavior as is evidenced by the strong objection to defining a Christian in terms of his behavior instead of his beliefs—as though any such separation were conceivable without depriving the former term of its content and the latter of its purpose. Even today most religious controversies begin with the question: "Do you believe?" omitting largely or entirely the crucial issue: "What does it mean in action and attitude to accept this particular belief?" Until the operational basis of our concepts is recognized and they are empirically related to action our controversies will remain verbal with no possibility of resolving them.

Endless illustrations of the implications of this procedure for religion could be given. I take the one which is perhaps most crucial "Do you believe in God?" How could this be approached in an operational manner? The first step would be to agree on one or more formulations as to what it would mean to hold such a belief. I do not propose to sketch all possible answers, but a few may be suggested. It might mean in terms of action that there is no evil in the world; or that such evil as we seem to see is an illusion; or that this world is so hopelessly evil that there is no salvation for man in nature or in history; or finally, that although evil is real we have a chance of overcoming it. All of these conclusions have been associated with a belief in God. The next step would be to formulate each of those definitions into hypothetical form, and look for the evidence which would support or deny it. One reply might be that to believe in God means that men should act on the assumption that this is the kind of world that can be made better. If they follow their own assumption they are compelled to say, then, that their belief must be tested by observing what they do with it, and not by what they say about it. And the only honest reply that can be made to the question of whether or not a man believes is: Sometimes yes, sometimes no. When he has courage and vision which eventuate in appropriate behavior he dares to say that he believes, when he does not so

act he can not lay claims to such a belief.

I have been dealing with the problem of religious knowledge and not primarily with the question of ethics, but it may be well to remind ourselves that the only way by which we can maintain the ethical content of religion and keep it within the great prophetic tradition is by vigorously insisting on the unity of belief and action—which is the essence of the modern scientific method. The latter may deny us the absolute, but if it puts righteousness in its place the loss has been small. Matthew Arnold quoted a remark of Bishop Wilson which is to the point: "If we would really know our heart let us view our actions." This is as true for an ethical religion as it is for one which is scientifically valid, and when it is forgotten it is as serious in the one realm as in the other.

One further aspect of this method may be recalled. It is assumed that empirical evidence is the only possible source of proof. Any issue which is so stated as to make it impossible to find such evidence available is a meaningless question. Obviously a supernatural solution is by definition ruled out of any court which demands evidence. It may be true, but so long as it is not stated in such a way that it can be tested, it remains an unintelligible statement to any empirical scientist.

Lastly, whatever conclusions are reached, they are in no sense final, but are the beginning of further explorations. In scientific knowledge, issues are settled only in the sense that they are available for further inquiry; not in such a way as to close them from further investigation. Remembering the method, how could we hope to reach ultimate solutions? Human problems dictated the issues; human minds formulated the meanings; through human activity the evidence was acquired and examined; it is not surprising that the conclusions should bear the marks of the process and be lacking the omniscience of some deity. Whatever an empirical method may give it will not be the absolute.

I suppose at the basis of any epistemology and metaphysics there is a value which has to some extent been arbitrarily chosen, or at least whose roots lie too deep for analysis. So it is in the choice between these two philosophies of nature and of history. But at least we may be explicit in the implications of our choice.

On the one hand there is an interpretation of the universe which purports to give an absolute report of the realm which lies behind

the veil of nature, which declares standards of justice and of right, which in no wise depend upon man's human insights, and which insists that though the things which are seen are temporal the things which are not are eternal. - There is no way of refuting this position, nor is there any way of demonstrating it.

To be contrasted with this position is the interpretation of those who have a much less ambitious claim. No final vision of reality or of history is sought or expected. The essential unity of man with all living things is accepted, man who fumblingly and often mistakenly seeks that kind of knowledge which will bit by bit enable him to live more abundantly. There is no great optimism in this faith; man may not be able to control his destiny and he may go down to defeat. But it seems clear that to the extent we repudiate the search for ordered methods of control and restrict the area within which they may be applied, there is indeed no hope. We may well bear in mind Santayana's statement: "To live by science requires intelligence and faith, but not to live by it is folly." We understand the passion for finality, but if we yield to it let us count the cost. We may seem to open the door to certainty, but we shall surely open it to every superstition and authoritarianism, political as well as religious, since that temper of mind cannot be kept in a compartment. At the same time that door will be closed to progress in the building of a kingdom of heaven on earth.

This is not to imply that there are not "practical absolutes" possible on the operational or experimental basis. Not all things are equally tentative even though nothing can ultimately be removed from the check of experience. Some beliefs such as the Christian emphasis on the worth of personality have been tested so often that they become presuppositions which are continually used in meeting various problems.

Yet a recognition of this does not alter the fact that a Christian philosophy of history does not need, and if it is to be intellectually valid, cannot give finality. Any scientific interpretation of history rests in part upon faith, but it is a faith defined in accordance with the best we can know: not one which defies intelligence and reason. Modern science does not deny a place to faith. Men must still step out beyond the known, must still risk their lives in battles where the outcome cannot yet be shown. This is faith just because it cannot be proved, but it is none-the-less required.

## U. S. Liberals and the U.S.S.R.\*

HAROLD P. MARLEY

*"... a deep-lying mental attitude which attempts . . . to analyse and integrate the varied intellectual, moral, religious, social, economic and political relationships of human society."*

*Encyclopedia of Social Sciences*

This definition of liberalism in this standard work is certainly inclusive enough to take in every possible reaction which liberals in this country may have manifested toward the Soviet Republics. It is this nation, occupying one-sixth the area of the habitable globe, more than any other group of people, which has been central in the thinking of progressive groups in this country. It is here that human relationships gauged by the utopian dreams of the ages have had their ordeal by fire. Often the analysis has not been conducive to the integration referred to in the definition quoted above, and, for reasons to be discussed in the present article, it has sometimes led to disintegration. Chilling disillusionment comes to kill what hope had generated, and the victim writes a second book to explain away his first.

Taking the various relationships of human society listed in the definition, there are times when liberals are impressed with the intellectual and cultural aspects of contemporary Russian life. They are thrilled by a Soviet cinema, or are touched by an art collection brought back by a former ambassador. At other times it is the moral and religious aspects that concern them. Here, their "deep-lying mental attitude" causes them to understand without much argument that the anti-religious crusade was in reality directed against the Orthodox Church, and that it was not a sign of moral breakdown. Instead, it was, more accurately, a freeing of altruistic motivation from a particular institution so that it could activate a new crusade which encompassed all life and involved every waking moment.

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\*Many religious liberals, of course, do not agree with the general outlook represented in this article. It is hoped, however, that the article will stimulate further discussion in the JOURNAL on an issue that is of paramount importance for liberal religion. [Editors' Note.]

It was in the economic field that Russia stood out unique—an island of socialism in an ocean of competing capitalist economy. Liberals knew to what extent the economic problem, after all Marxism was stripped away, was indeed the number one issue of modern life—the thing that determined internal politics and tipped the scales against all attempts to create a warless world. Even though the Russians didn't agree on their Marx, at least they had buried the profit motive far down below the tomb of Lenin. In America we were only able to proscribe exploitation in Resolutions, and only a few "Christian" employers had tried out the Golden Rule in their factories. Some, believing in "The Middle Way," threw themselves into the cooperative movement, and divided profits. But all this was child's play beside the other—pretty red toys that were dangerously anaesthetic, instead of being threats against society's growing economic cancer. Even the New Deal with its big-brother policy toward the third of the nation which was ill-fed, ill-housed and ill-clothed, was not even close to basic farm and factory adjustments that would solve the problem.

In all these matters of intellectual, religious, social and economic interest, the leading American liberals courageously retained their deep-lying favorable attitude toward the land of the Red Star. It was in that other relationship, the political, where most antagonism arose. We were annoyed at the treatment accorded Trotsky. We grimaced at the passport restrictions, and when the espionage and disloyalty trials were in progress, many of us liquidated all our previous enthusiasm. The phrase Fifth Column had not been invented, so we went back to the French Revolution and called it a "reign of terror." As to the Russian assistance extended to China, many liberals read between the lines of Edgar Snow's book, *Red Star Over China*, and saw in this aid a kind of political buccaneering. And the Soviet aid to the Spanish Republic, which got through in spite of the Tory blockade (albeit far less than the tonnage the Democracies shipped to Italy and Germany for transfer), was thought to be a kind of bait held out to capture the moderate peoples' government by cunning and intrigue. Fearing political consequences at home, American congressmen took the easy-going attitude that the Spanish conflict was between Fascism and Communism; therefore, in spite of a treaty of assistance which we had with Spain, we let the international gangsters have their way.

With the outbreak of World War II, which Russia had done more than any other European nation to prevent, liberals began to leap clear of the ark of Soviet friendship. They quickly forgot the masterful speeches of Litvinof at the Disarmament Conference which always came directly to the point of saying, "We are here to disarm, let's disarm," for Litvinof had been displaced as Commissar for Foreign Affairs. Forgotten also was the fact that the Red Army had professed its willingness to act in concert with France and England to save Czecho-Slovakia. Safe in their life-boats, these erstwhile friends of the Soviets waited for the ark to be sunk by the impact of such deadly torpedoes as:

The failure of collective security  
The Russo-German trade agreement  
The Russian occupation of East Poland  
The signing of a non-aggression pact with Germany and later with Japan  
The Russo-Finnish War

The progressive movement in the United States became so emotional in its attitude toward Russia that it was hard to distinguish it from the uncritical daily press. On January 21, 1940, a sermon was preached in New York City by a Russian friend of long standing. He called it, "Why We Liberals Went Wrong on the Russian Revolution," and he pointed out that he had been "deceived, deluded and disgraced." He even said in his "supreme disillusionment," that he felt that the Russian people were back "in a captivity worse than any ever known in the darkest days of the Tsar." Some leaders of American thought could understand the Russo-German non-aggression pact in the light of the English Tory failure to participate in a realistic program of collective security, but the average intellectual thought he saw a plot, a green light for Hitler to go ahead. It was the Finnish war, however, which did more than anything else to throw the understanding of American liberals completely out of focus. Like Belgium, in the last war, it was a symbol. We were reminded that Finland paid its war debts, but we were not told that the only reason she did was that we needed her wood pulp. We were not told that another nation, which didn't pay its debts, had superintended the building of the Mannerheim line.

The Finnish relief drive headed by Herbert Hoover took on huge proportions and had the political effect of forcing into the

defensive all those who still retained their faith in the Soviets, and were simultaneously seeking to aid the victims of fascist aggression who were interned in prison camps in Southern France. American Finns were feted as they sailed to defend their homeland, while only a few months before, our Attorney General ordered a post-facto investigation of Americans who had helped to route members of the International Brigade to Spain.

The peace treaty signed in March, 1940, should have helped to reassure those who had refused to believe that Russia was fighting an imperialist war of aggression. The valuable port of Petsamo and the extensive nickel mines repaired after their destruction by the Finnish army, were handed back. Had the world known today what Russia knew then, a few strong concentration camps for Finnish Quislings would have shortened the present war. One English churchman, the Dean of Canterbury and formerly an engineer and business man, wrote a new introduction to a book which he had published on Russia before the Finnish struggle. He stated that "the desire of our ruling class in Great Britain to insult and injure the Soviet Union has been a leading source of mischief in the past twenty-two years," never to be more flagrantly shown "than in the months from November 30, 1939, when the Russo-Finnish war broke out, to May 10, 1940, the day when Hitler struck." To make the story official, it is only necessary to mention *Mission to Moscow*, written by a millionaire lawyer who was our ambassador to Russia during the critical pre-war years. His dated commentary states on March 17, 1938 that "Along with the rest of Europe, this country is extremely war-conscious. . . . There are indications that this Government is going more isolationist than ever before. War is terribly close." And again, he records that Litvinof said that the smaller States "were all frightened, and that the only thing that would prevent complete Fascist domination of Europe was a change of government or policy in Great Britain." If some American liberals still believe that their position needs an admixture of respectability, let them read this current best-seller.

When Norman Thomas wrote *Socialism on the Defensive*, he lamented the plight of the Russian—poorly housed, poorly fed and a victim of a terrific speed-up system. The socialist leader had seen this himself in his own country as well as in the land

of the Soviets, but when he wrote about the "Okies" he never felt called upon to quote authorities comparable to Max Eastman and the *Saturday Evening Post*. His great grudge against Russia then (1938) was that he felt it had become just another totalitarian state. His view of classical socialism, and rightly, was that it should add to the store of human freedom, not reduce it. But all those liberals who fell into the Stalin-Hitler-Mussolini rhetorical device of speaking, committed a serious and unforgivable violation of the thesis of "a deep-lying mental attitude which attempts to analyse and integrate." They jumped at integration without bothering to analyse. They unconsciously played into the hands of Tory politics which was gambling on a war of attrition between Germany and Russia, on the latter's soil, and at the cost of emasculation for both. This holier-than-thou attitude blissfully ignored the many infringements to freedom which Britain practiced among her colonies and the United States dealt out to her minorities.

It is probable that the true explanation for suspicion of Moscow is not to be found in theory, or even in the practice of the Soviets, but rather in something much less academic. This is the problem of getting on with communists on the home front. Had all the various shades of Leftists been able to work on a United Front basis, the thorough-going liberal attitude toward Russia would probably have been maintained through the difficult days just past. The Browder-Thomas feud was not personal, but grew out of party strife and was nurtured by a few unhappy events at Madison Square Garden mass meetings. While the sins of the capitalist economy hurried on unabated, Norman Thomas was taking up his time in the election campaigns of 1936 and 1940 telling what was wrong with Communism. Earl Browder retaliated. Squeezed between these two parties were the Trotskyites, and their offshoot, the Lovestoneites. Spread out as a virgin territory before them all was the huge new labor union, the C.I.O. All made their bid to dominate the councils of this militant industrial-type union, said to have been inspired by Stalin and financed by Moscow gold. All were successful to a degree, but the several successes added up to the single truth that the American labor movement would have to develop its own leadership. Even the leftist clergy who signed petitions and spoke at mass rallies could not be trusted to see the struggle through.

The depression conditions which produced the C.I.O., also produced the United Front organizations, or to use the Martin Dies opprobrium, "front" associations. They were made up of assorted liberals who saw a threat to American democracy in laws that required teachers to swear their loyalty to the government and forced minority political groups into blind alleys. Since these repressive measures were aimed primarily at the communists, it was only natural that communists should take the lead in forming these all-liberal committees which would battle such Hearsteria. A liberal who served in this capacity usually knew it when he was sitting beside a communist, and because he did thus associate with communists, he knew they were not dangerous. He always retained his freedom of choice and knew how to protect his interests. Thus, he was never flattered when others gratuitously set about to protect him. Such an exposé of civil-right and anti-war groups was made in a recent issue of *The Reader's Digest* by the last-laughing Max Eastman—an article reprinted from the *American Mercury*. The fact that thousands of copies of this article were reprinted so that any reader might secure three copies on request gives a rather definite indication that this most popular *Digest* had gone in for propaganda rather than propagation of good literature.

As Eastman pointed out, these popular-front organizations took in writers, artists, professors and preachers who were not communists, but who were anxious to do what they could to stem the rising Fascism abroad and at home. Sometimes the extent of the cooperation was consent to have their names used, and letter-heads got longer and longer. They also got into the hands of the Dies Committee whose sleuthing was hardly as efficient as the F.B.I. Dies's technique was to prove that one or two names were known communists—therefore all were. This made a certain socialist in Detroit so angry that he threatened suit. After that, we began to hear the phrase "fellow traveler" which was almost as effective, as it kept the liberals on the defensive. Eastman followed the tactic of Mrs. Dilling in her *Red Network* of listing individuals and organizations polluted by radicalism. He even listed the Russian War Relief which he said has "in its organization the same people who . . . put over the American Peace Mobilization." The answer to this charge came in the form of a

brochure which listed three hundred and twelve prominent Americans as "among our national endorsers," including Major George Fielding Eliot; musicians Heifetz, Menuhin and Zimbalist; writers Dorothy Canfield Fisher and James Truslow Adams; seminary presidents Coffin and Snow; and movie actors Douglas Fairbanks, Jr. and Helen Hayes. Whatever these scores of leaders ever thought of the Soviets, they are now solidly of the opinion that the Red Army has done a magnificent and unexpected job and that providing medical supplies and other assistance is the least we can do to help.

This is not enough. It is apparent that the seeds of innuendo as recently sown as the December issue of the *Reader's Digest* by Max Eastman, must have their ugly fruit destroyed. One group that is trying to help is called the American Council of Soviet Relations. Corliss Lamont and three ministers are on the national board. Mary van Kleeck is chairman of the research committee. In another field the damage done in the split of the group who were helping the loyalist remnants in France (the communist element stood for rebuking France; non-communists for appeasement) is being smoothed out by the International Rescue and Relief Committee. This committee was formed from two other groups and now lists Robert Hutchins, Raymond Gram Swing, Roger Baldwin, Stuart Chase, William H. Kilpatrick, Upton Sinclair, Paul Muni and others as sponsors. It refers to itself as a kind of "underground railway" and claims that more than 1250 men and women who are now in the Western Hemisphere owe their lives to its assistance.

Other damage to be rectified is that which occurred in the Teachers' Union and, of all places, in the American Civil Liberties Union. Under the leadership of George S. Counts, who wrote "Dare the Schools Build a New Social Order," three of the strongest locals were expelled from the Teachers' Union on the ground that they followed too strictly the communist line, and, here is the joker—on the basis that the communism they espoused was *undemocratic*. Thus did one-time liberal pedagogues rationalize their own undemocratic position. In the national board of the A.C.L.U., almost the same thing happened against the advice of America's most stalwart and thorough-going liberal, Harry F. Ward. He had worked with communists in the League for Peace

and Democracy, and those familiar with this League know that he was no "figurehead" in it as Eastman suggests, nor was it an "elaborate swindle of public opinion." Dr. Ward spent his sabbaticals in a pilgrimage to Russia instead of the Holy Land, and he has consistently maintained his understanding of the Soviet problem. He has not tried to make over communists after the Christian pattern, and he has pointed out that they are the "shock troops" in the present world revolution.

While everyone was joining in red baiting, Dr. Ward was the first to see that we had whole departments of our government and high officials who were in fact Fascists. He pointed out this un-American tendency in definite acts of the State Department. He was condemned at the hearings of the Dies committee, but he was not allowed to appear to answer the charges, even though one of his former students, J. B. Matthews, is special investigator for Dies. While we have been enjoying these little wars on the Left, the Right has been steadily usurping the main show. With varying degrees of applause for their efforts, the agencies of the law of free America have:

Sent Earl Browder to prison

Arrested Trotskyites in Minneapolis

Started proceedings to revoke citizenship of William Schneiderman

Imprisoned communists in Oklahoma for possession of radical literature

Almost succeeded in deporting Harry Bridges, saved first by Frances Perkins and then by Pearl Harbor.

We proudly say that we have freedom to discuss issues in this country, but what do we do with it? We say that to "follow a line" especially when it turns, is weak if not criminal, even though the great Emerson said "a foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds." Let liberals, who detest the closed mind, beware of the crime of little-mindedness. The little mind is incapable of seeing that while we persecute a minority political group, another minority group that is larger and that usually votes Democratic, has in many places already usurped the prerogatives we claim the communists would usurp, if elected. American liberals had better begin to define their terms, especially the overworked Greek word,

democracy. They had better become realistic enough to understand that an Allied victory probably means that Communism is going to sweep over Europe like a prairie fire, and when it does, it is entirely possible that the things they most detest in the Soviet system will be cauterized away.

Liberals need to know where they stand, and to know that when they take a middle-of-the-road position they are extreme right-wing liberals. Draw a perpendicular line. On the left of it, write "liberal" and further to the left, write "radical." On the right of it, put down the word "conservative" and further to the right, put down "reactionary." Then, on a horizontal line, place a dot at the point where you believe your position on Russia places you. If you are in doubt, there are tests, such as those described in Teachers College Contributions to Education Bulletin No. 640 by which Dr. Thomas A. Symington has classified religious liberals and conservatives. The important thing to keep in mind is that there are four categories of thinking and action, not three. To hover around the neutral position is not to be a typical liberal, but it is walking hand-in-hand with conservatism. In the question of attitude toward Russia, clearly, the liberal must swing to the Left and even risk being called a "radical" for the glory of intellectual honesty if not of downright conviction. British liberals have moved in this direction more freely, partly because of their nearness to the scene, somewhat from a reaction to Toryism, but mostly because they have "analysed and integrated" the various factors of Russian life into what seems to be a convincing answer to the chaos of the world.

Let liberals in religion awaken to their opportunity. If they are thoroughgoing progressives in both economics and religion they are in a unique position, for they can close the circuit between the grand tradition of religion and this present economic problem. The Reformation really fell short because Martin Luther failed to carry his religious freedom over into the economic realm. He was horrified at the uprisings of land-hungry peasants. The economic revolution today can also fall flat if liberals fail to see the connection between economics and religion—between living and living well. They can relate Soviet principles to the humanist basis of culture. They, and perhaps they alone, can also keep life from becoming enmeshed in the wheels of materialism. The liberal

minister has vital contact with both these aspects of life. The communist and the fundamentalist cannot possibly integrate the two. He can.

He can perceive the forces in his own government, in his community and in his own parish which are setting up antagonisms between these two complementary aspects of Life. He must be wise in his "analysis" and he must not allow his "integration" to be affected by the gratuitous counseling of those who say "go into social service" or "forget all this lighting of candles and ecclesiastics." Those who look askance at the radical contacts the liberal church has been able to establish will eventually recognize the desirability of the position of leadership attained by the minister in this field.

Only by holding firm to the conviction that social reform and a deepening of the religious experience are not mutually exclusive—that there is a prophetic as well as a priestly element within every pastorate, will the liberal church be able to serve to the maximum, and eventually relate both phases of life. This may be the only guarantee against an American fascism of the Coughlin-Smith type which is actually uniting Catholics and Protestant fundamentalists in some urban centers today under the banner of the Ku Klux Klan. Clergymen who have consciously, or unconsciously, worked with communists have invaluable experience which can be made available so that mistakes on both sides can be rectified in the interest of harmony for the common cause. Let all liberals *move* in the liberal tradition, not *stand* in it, for the most useless persons in eras of rapid transition are those who doggedly hold to the grandfather clause in their thinking, thus actually violating the spirit of those who in former days were in fact moving away from the conservatism of their own generation.

# Prophetic Religion in the South

*A Report by Two Meadville Students*

JOHN HAYWARD AND ROBERT SOERHEIDE

Southern hospitality, with its long standing tradition of courtesy and gentility, spiced with an atmosphere of fiesta and good humor, does not succeed in hiding a shaky economic structure in the land of cotton. A recent article by H. M. Miller on "Religion in the South" indicates that all is not well for the Southern planter or worker because agriculture is declining, population is increasing, and the migration of some of the South's most virile element toward northern industrial centers is sapping the vitality of the South.<sup>1</sup> The maintenance of a so-called benevolent paternalism by the southern planters toward the negroes and "poor whites" serves to aggravate rather than alleviate the soreness of this situation in which many Americans are being denied not only some minimum rights of citizenship and education, but are also bound by threats of violence and terrorism to a miserable penury.

Where injustice and servitude are the answers to a human problem the voice of true religion is needed. It was because of this deeply felt need that Claude Williams founded the People's Institute of Applied Religion.<sup>2</sup> The purpose of this organization is to train southern free-lance and crossroads preachers to use the prophetic literature of the Bible as a spring board of social protest and simultaneously to cultivate a Christian community that will see the necessity of providing for the needs of Christians here and now as well as over "yonder."

From May 1 to May 4, the People's Institute held a conference in St. Louis, attended by 40 negro and white farmer-preachers from the various states of the cotton belt who have been share-croppers and who are now bringing this new prophetic Christianity

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<sup>1</sup>*Christendom*, Summer 1942.

<sup>2</sup>Readers of this JOURNAL will be interested to know that the following Unitarians are among the sponsors of The People's Institute of Applied Religion: Sydney B. Snow, John Howland Lathrop, L. M. Birkhead, and James Luther Adams. A detailed statement of the principles and policies of the Institute were set forth in an article entitled "South of God" by Dean Joseph F. Fletcher in the Summer 1941 issue of THE JOURNAL

to their people. Conference plans were made for about 75 delegates, but the late spring this year delayed cotton planting and many were unable to get away. Of those who did attend, some had to sneak away under cover of night, not knowing what would befall them on return.

The real life stories told by these people who are bearing the yoke of the South suggest that the word "share-cropper" is a radical misnomer; unless by sharing one means what Aesop meant in the fable "The Lion's Share." The lion, fox, jackal, and wolf killed a stag and quartered it, and the lion thereafter took all four pieces. The fox made the comment, "You may share the labors of the great, but you will not share the spoil."

A young man who came from a sharecropper's camp told of working for  $12\frac{1}{2}$ c an hour, and others complained about the "doodlum book" which contains credit money, good only in their own boss's store. There are people on the large plantations who have never seen real money.

This example raised one of the major problems considered at the Institute, the fact that pre-Civil War chattel slavery has been replaced by wage slavery. Other problems dealt with were anti-Semitism and racism, poll tax collection in eight southern states (thus denying the vote to penniless millions), misuse of scripture by "boss-hired" preachers to justify the oppression of the plantation workers, Jim Crowism, and the use of a "strong arm" policy to prevent the people from meeting to discuss their problems.

One by one these grievances were dealt with. The printed program for the meetings provided a pattern for discussion; the delegates arose with spontaneous zeal to tell of the difficulties which were taking shape in the various states. Williams never allowed the direction of the discussion to wander far from the firm ground of a Biblical interpretation. He distinguished repeatedly between two kinds of religion, the true and the false; and the key phrase of all the meetings was "God is with the people." It follows from this that where the people are suffering, God is suffering; where

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OF LIBERAL RELIGION. In that same issue of the JOURNAL appears also a review by Kenneth Leslie, Editor of *The Protestant*, of Cedric Belfrage's biography of Claude Williams, *South of God* (New York: Modern Age Books, 1941).

Four Meadville students, along with theological students from other seminaries in Chicago, attended the sessions of the Institute described in the ensuing article.

the people are oppressed, God is oppressed; and where there is a basis of love in the people, there is a union of love with God.

A large part of each day was spent in the instruction of the southern leaders of the people toward the effective use of visual aid charts. Each chart has from eight to ten pictures portraying a religious-social message accompanied by numerous Bible references. The general topics of some of the charts are "Anti-Semitism and Racism," "Religion and Progress," "The Galilean and the Common People," and "King Cotton—His Holds and Slaves." The vital relation between religion and life was further demonstrated in the conference by a responsive reading entitled "A People's Statement of Faith" from which the following excerpts have been selected:

*Leader: WE SHALL EVER STAND:* For government of the *people*, by the *people*, and for the *people*.

*People:* For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. (Eph. 6:12.)

*Leader:* For complete separation of church and state, and for the freedom of conscience and of worship.

*People:* Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and the orphans in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from *this world*. (James 1:27.)

*Leader: WE BELIEVE:* In the constitution of the United States and its amendments, and in our free institutions guaranteed by it.

*People:* Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter! (Isa. 5:20.)

*Leader:* In extending the privileges and benefits of our heritage to all people, without regard to race, sex, creed or color.

*People:* God is no respecter of persons: but in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness is accepted with him. (Acts 10:34, 35.)."

In its religious quality the conference was a living example of Claude Williams' own dictum: "It is the genius of religion to speak to suffering people." It was the genius of the conference to call forth spontaneous testimony from among suffering people. In mutual trust these people came to view their own oppressed condition in its relation to the vast historical trends of our time; together they achieved a prophetic yearning for justice and a real sense of being allied with the power and will of God against the iniquities of social cruelty and oppression. And in the midst of their righteous anger, one could sense that this fire was born not of hate but of love,—a deep-souled longing for a higher community of men, which by its very strength and goodness might

bring comfort to their wasted bodies and meaning to their lives.

Early in the conference Owen Whitfield, associate director, from Kirkwood, Missouri, discussed the meaning of applied religion. "Religion is like a bottle of liniment on the shelf; it is no good to a man with a cut finger, unless it is taken down, uncorked, and applied. Christ is no use to us sittin' far off in heaven. For years I took pride in gettin' people ready for Grace where they could find rest in the Lord. But lately I've been thinkin' that folks ought to have a little rest this side of Grace. You know it was the plantation boss who taught us this song: 'O wait, meekly, wait and go to heaven.' He gave us an aspirin and now the pain is come back wus. You can't keep God in heaven; he will keep comin' out in people's hearts; you can't stop it. Ever' time someone shouted 'Heaven!' we looked up; and when we looked down,—our plates was empty. Jesus asked for some heaven on this earth—the poor to be fed, the naked clothed,—and they crucified him, gave him scars. But men with scars are close to Jesus. If you don't believe in Brother Williams just look at his back."

Just as Karl Marx condemned ideological Christianity as "the opiate of the people," so Whitfield characterized mere "boss-hired preaching" as "liniment" and "aspirin." The influence of Marx upon his followers has been to make them antagonistic to all religion. But Williams and Whitfield wisely understand that any thorough-going revolt against an established type of religion and the evils attendant thereon, is itself basically religious; its fulcrum of criticism, content of knowledge and power of achievement are neither purely altruistic and humanitarian nor purely selfish and subjective. A transcendent power for justice is felt working in the very life of the people; but it is a power operating as the will of God in history rather than as the corporate unfolding of selfish desires in the class struggle. Should this language seem to some to be but another form of ideology using Biblical symbolism, let them judge impartially the quotations in this article. Here is religious utterance that should compel any man to a searching of his conscience and to righteous resolution, regardless of his economic interests or attachments. To be sure, the People's Institute is class conscious and acknowledges the existence of the class struggle. These people are themselves in the fight on the side of the working men. But what they ask is justice under God, a

community oriented to the ideal of the Christian Kingdom, rather than "the dictatorship of the proletariat" or a drastic denial of law and of love.

The following quotation has been patched together from the remarks of Williams and Whitfield. "Moses tried to do the fightin' for the people and to tell them that he and God would fix things up if they would just sit quiet. He tried to give God the hot end of the poker. But God said to him, 'Moses—you must speak to the people and tell them to fight for themselves. I ain't going to do anything for them less'n they get goin' on their own.' Let us here and now resolve that the sheepishness of the sheep is more to be condemned than the wolfishness of the wolf. I say to you not blessed are the poor in spirit but rather: Blessed are the spirited poor. The poor won't inherit the earth until they get sassy enough to take it. Nobody cares for a Negro or a white man a-layin' out there under a shade tree like po' dead possum. Shake a possum out of a tree, the dogs come and he just folds up his arms and gives up. But you run one of these big old coons up a tree and then call your dogs; he comes down out of that tree but he ain't givin' up without a fight. A man can't hear no call from the Lord while he is lyin' around sniffin' ashes. The Lord don't call nobody who ain't first started in of his own self to do the work of the Lord where he sees it has to be done."

The religious quality of the People's Institute was expressed not merely in their fighting spirit. Good humor tempered their "double determination" and a spirit of love strengthened and ennobled their reformers' zeal. One speaker said, "A good old colored sister was prayin' hard and she said, 'I am going to ask you one more thing, Father, and I know you can't do it but I am going to give you a chance anyway. Please bring our people together.'" As if in answer to that prayer, Mrs. Owen Whitfield, mother of fifteen children of whom twelve are now living and six are in the army, spoke to the whole group. For many of us, her speech was the high point of the conference.

"I have worked very hard and seen much suffering. And now that I am working with the People's Institute I am much happier. And what I can't understand is how the rich folks can enjoy life with so much crying and sorrowing around them and them not doing anything about it.

"I pray to the Lord and say that he should draw us all together in Christian love—and I don't know what that love is but I say to God, 'Please, Sir, draw us together in that love that only you can understand.' Back in 1938 I saw a shadow of that love when we led the demonstration on the highway. I walked among those tents and people and I knew that here was the Lord. Right then I cried out a prayer in thanks to him."

"If wealth will lift me above the head of my brethren, then I don't want it. Keep me, Lord, with the people where I can do good and where I can know what love you can give to us out of the hidden mystery."

"You just feel the Father in you; it makes you shed tears and you ain't ashamed. I could shout out now, Hallelujah! in thanks for the blessing of you folks here who understand. And for Brother Williams—he didn't bring no dogs here nor no police. We is here in the love and will of God, in understanding of each other, black and white, all together."

Immediately after Mrs. Whitfield's speech Brother Hughes spontaneously led a song as he had often done throughout the conference. Then Brother Williams said "Any man who has not experienced what people feel who are in a struggle for justice and righteousness together, doesn't know anything about true religion. And he who has doesn't care what people say about him."

To all those who hope for a renewal of prophetic zeal in Protestantism, work such as that of Claude Williams and the People's Institute of Applied Religion should be of major significance. The St. Louis Conference emphasized the fact that the time is even now at hand when all our instruments of freedom and justice must be vigorously defended from a multitude of mortal enemies and positively asserted against them. If we believe that the church, in the name of God, must strike a telling blow for democracy, we must develop the same sense of urgency that pervaded the Jefferson Day Speech of Abraham Lincoln, when he said, "This is a world of compensations; and he who would be no slave must consent to have no master. Those who deny freedom to others deserve it not for themselves, and, under a just God, cannot long retain it."

## *The Western Messenger*<sup>\*</sup>

JOHN G. GREENE

*The Western Messenger* first appeared in 1835. The last number was published in 1841.

There are eight little leather-bound volumes. The first is almost two inches thick, but each of the others has only half the thickness of the first one, indicating all too clearly that the founders had begun a little too ambitiously.

The leather of the binding is cracked. The pages are yellow and fragile with age. Even the format is old-fashioned. The pages are smaller than we are used to—eight inches down and five inches across.

The impression of age persists as one begins to look through the pages. Contributions are headed “Article 1,” “Article 2,” and so on. Most of them are written in a diffuse style that has quite gone out of fashion since that time. The editors, as well as many of the contributors, never seemed to weary of expressing the same idea in different ways!

But if the binding and paper are old, and the style that of a more leisurely generation, the contents themselves are remarkably fresh for a periodical that expired a full century ago. The editors obviously had the ability to discern what was important in theology and in literature, and to persuade some of the most gifted scholars and poets of the English-speaking world to contribute to their pages. There were original articles by Thomas Carlyle, William Ellery Channing, James Freeman Clarke, John Sullivan Dwight, Margaret Fuller, W. H. Furness and Theodore Parker. Ralph Waldo Emerson’s “Good-bye, Proud World,” “The Rhodora” and “To the Humble-bee” first appeared in the *Messenger*; John Keats’ “Ode to Apollo” and letters describing the walking tour of 1818 were here published for the first time. In addition, we find reprints of recently published writings by George Bancroft, William Cullen Bryant and Nathaniel Hawthorne, and numerous

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\*Read at the May, 1941, meeting of the Unitarian Historical Society, King's Chapel, Boston.

translations from contemporary German literature. Many pages were devoted to criticisms and reviews of the works of authors as diverse as Wordsworth, Harriet Martineau and Lyman Beecher.

The *Messenger*, then, was by no means devoted entirely to religious and philosophical questions. The editors meant to have it that way, for the review at the beginning bore the legend, "Devoted to Religion and Literature," but towards the end the spheres of influence were extended to "Religion, Life and Literature."

Nevertheless, the magazine was devoted *primarily* to religious questions: and the editors had the happy faculty of dealing with the basic religious issues of the time, and of ignoring issues of lesser importance. Emerson's "Divinity School Address," for example, was carefully discussed; and so was Andrews Norton's reply, "The Latest Form of Infidelity." In considering the great theological issue of the times for theological liberals, the magazine gradually moved from a position of benevolent neutrality to a cordial acceptance of the basic transcendentalist position, which was that of accepting truth *transcending evidence of the senses*. It is interesting to note that at least ten of the writers for *The Western Messenger* also contributed to *The Dial* (1840-1844).

Although all the editors and most of the supporters of the *Messenger* were Unitarians, yet the review was not even unofficially an organ of the Unitarian denomination except in 1836-37, when it was published by the Western Unitarian Association. In fact, the editors claimed to value the truths they professed much more highly than they did the name of Unitarian; and, although they were interested in the welfare of the denomination, they expressed their willingness to allow the denomination to disappear if through its disappearance their views could be advanced. In the statement of purpose in the first volume we read, "A primary object of this work is to set forth and defend Unitarian views of Christianity," but later on in the statement it says "We hope to avoid as far as possible a sectarian character. We care little for the name of Unitarian. We are willing that the word should be blotted out of the theological vocabulary, if whatever of truth is embodied in it were but generally diffused."

In a brief article in the first volume, in answer to a critical (and apparently narrow-minded) article in *The Baptist Cross and*

*Journal*, there is this reply: "It is our peculiar boast and crown of rejoicing, that we have *affinities* with what is good in every denomination. Far from being ashamed, we glory in the fact that there is hardly a sect so despised by the Chief Priests and Elders of Orthodoxy, but we can find some little leaven of good about them. . . .

"There is one thing, however, with which we have no affinity and wish for none. We are at war with that exclusive and narrow spirit which cannot look over the palings of its own sect, or see anything good out of that body to which it is attached."

This spirit was maintained throughout. In the prefatory statement to the last volume we read: "In our opinion, *The Western Messenger* ought never to be the organ of a sect. . . . We seek union, not division. If we know our own hearts, our solemn purpose is to co-operate with the good of all parties, sects and denominations. We would preach and practice Christian eclecticism. We would 'prove all things and hold fast the good everywhere.'"

## II.

In the beginning, editorial responsibility was apportioned among members of an editorial board. But this arrangement did not work out well. As they themselves wrote in the introduction to the first number, they were "stationed at different points in an immense territory." It is twelve hundred miles from Buffalo to St. Louis; and in those days Cincinnati and Louisville (where the two other members of the board lived) was a day's journey apart! "Of course we can have little personal intercourse together, and absolutely no concert in regard to the articles which we prepare for the successive numbers of the Messenger. . . . No one of us is appointed censor over the rest, or is responsible for anything but what he himself writes. If any person therefore looks for unity or perfect consistency in our magazine, he will be disappointed. . . . We flatter ourselves, however, that we are not the less likely on this account to arrive at truth, or to preserve in their purity the principles which we advocate."

Be this as it may, the burden came to fall chiefly on the shoulders of Rev. Ephraim Peabody, who was then in charge of the Unitarian church in Cincinnati, where the magazine was published during the first year of its existence. But Peabody was not a well man, and even the efforts of volunteer editorial assist-

ants were not sufficient to enable the magazine to appear with regularity. So in 1836 the *Messenger* was moved to Louisville and entrusted to the care of James Freeman Clarke, who had but recently been graduated from the Harvard Divinity School and sent to Louisville to become the minister of the Unitarian Church in that city. The choice was a remarkably good one. Clarke was a friend of many of the eminent religious leaders of his day, and was able to secure original contributions from Channing, Emerson, Theodore Parker and other significant thinkers. His was a rare blend of sympathy and critical thought, choosing the best in men and in systems of thought, as his sympathetic description of Alexander Campbell and his greatest work, *Ten Great Religions*, were to reveal. He was a most prolific writer; books, sermons, articles and reviews flowed from his pen in a steady stream. And finally, he had a notable talent for practical affairs. No wonder that *The Western Messenger* was a success under his guidance.

In 1839, Clarke relinquished the editorship of the magazine returning to Boston in the following year. The *Messenger* was then brought back to Cincinnati and (after a brief period when it was edited by a committee of three) was placed under the guidance of Ephraim Peabody's successor at the Unitarian Church: William Henry Channing, nephew of the first great leader of New England Unitarianism. After an interval, during which the magazine's debts were fully paid, Channing started the magazine going again. But he lacked Clarke's genius for the practical. The magazine lasted for only a little more than a year under his guidance, and then permanently ceased to exist.

### III

Why did *The Western Messenger* fail? It failed, of course, because it did not attract enough subscribers and contributors to keep it alive.

Why could it not achieve this solid financial support? One reason was that Clarke had ceased to be editor. Clarke was a man who could get things done. As long as the *Messenger* was under his direction, it succeeded reasonably well in meeting its bills, and remarkably well in securing contributions from able and stimulating writers. When he left the Middle West and turned the review over to the less practical and less energetic William Henry Channing, its early demise was a foregone conclusion.

Another cause was unquestionably the fact that the *Messenger* had become a full-fledged organ of transcendental thought. The more conservative Unitarians of the Middle West were much disturbed by the radical trend in religious questions taken by the paper during its last years, particularly under Channing's guidance.

The third cause of the *Messenger's* decline was undoubtedly its New England character. Though published successively in Cincinnati, in Louisville and then again in Cincinnati, it might have been published in Boston (at least after the first two or three years) for all the awareness it showed of its place of origin. The successive editors and most of the supporters were transplanted New England Unitarians, and they looked on Boston as their spiritual home. Perhaps *that* was the principal reason for the early demise of their excellent little review. There would have been a place for a journal of the sort, edited with a more sympathetic understanding of the point of view of Mid-Westerners. Most people in that region were profoundly interested in religious questions, and a goodly proportion of them were already hospitable to "Unitarian views of Christianity." The adherence to such views on the part of many highly respected political leaders of that and an earlier day, among them John Adams, Jefferson, Marshall, John Quincy Adams, Calhoun; the influence upon Transylvania University for some years by Unitarians; the frequent and cordial cooperation of members of the Unitarian and Christian denominations—notably in the founding and maintenance of Antioch College some years later—all these facts would lead one to suppose that a journal like the *Messenger* should have succeeded almost in spite of itself! But the great majority of the religious liberals of the Middle West, although believing fervently in "the fatherhood of God, the brotherhood of man, the leadership of Jesus" (to quote a part of Clarke's famous statement of the Unitarian faith of his day), did not believe in the article later added to the statement by an anonymous wit: "the neighborhood of Boston." It is a commonplace of journalism that if the interests of one particular region are unduly emphasized in a magazine, the magazine, however it fares in that region, will not have a wide circulation beyond its boundaries. As a Western critic once put the matter, *The Western Messenger* was "essentially an eastern messenger!"

## IV.

"This periodical is devoted to the spread of a rational and liberal religion. . . . We believe no other form of religion can prevail in the West."

The promoters had had great hopes for the easy victory of their particular type of religion, "Christianity," they wrote, "is rational. It offers itself to the reason; it urges men to think independently; it is an open and legible book. As such let it be known, and it will subdue even the stubbornest of all enemies to truth, that cold and heartless system of inconsistencies called skepticism." "Unitarian views of Christianity" were to vanquish not only orthodoxy to the right of it, but skepticism to the left. Surely an optimistic declaration of faith. In these days, after a hundred years, we have less confidence in the power of that which "offers itself to the reason" and not to the emotions as well.

In another respect, however, the magazine prophesied more truly: "A great movement is going on, although outward forms continue unaltered. To a casual observer, all seems unchanged. The ancient names are retained—the old phraseology, long ago become merely technical, is still used. But those who look beneath the surface perceive that every thing is rapidly changing, and will not be surprised if they see what is denounced as heresy today, praised as orthodoxy tomorrow. The change of 'the letter' is what attracts common attention; the real change is of 'the spirit.'"

The editors realized full well how this change takes place: "We speak of great revolutions, and ascribe the cause of great changes to a few violent commotions, but the seed of every reformation is sown in silence and grows up unnoticed, and not until the 'full corn in the ear' appears, is it perceived how great a work has been accomplished."

To those of us who, like the editors of *The Western Messenger*, are more deeply concerned with the spread of truth than with the spread of a name or of a denomination, the wisdom of these spiritual pioneers has been made manifest. Though the Unitarian denomination has comparatively few members in the Middle West and is but one among many, "Unitarian views of Christianity" are shared by millions of people of other names. Thus, by losing itself, Unitarianism has found itself in the heart of America and has justified the wisdom of those who planned and guided *The Western Messenger*.

## Book Reviews

### UNIVERSALIST BEGINNINGS

John Murray, the founder of Universalism in America, was born at Alton, England, in 1741. His parents belonged to the evangelical and strongly Calvinistic group in the Church of England which withdrew to form the Methodist church. Murray began his preaching with this school of thought in association with George Whitefield.

Apparently Universalism in America is derived from three sources: first, the followers of Murray, representing those evangelical Trinitarians who revolted from English Methodism; second, the followers of Hosea Ballou, co-founder, whose background was that of a New England Baptist with a liberal and Unitarian bias; and third, that derived from those New England Congregational churches which were more evangelical than the rationalistic Unitarian-Congregational element, but more liberal than those which remained orthodox.

The story of Murray's early life in England and Ireland, his break with Calvinism and his conversion to the Universalist faith in "the final harmony of all souls with God," is well portrayed in the opening chapters and much new material is to be found here.<sup>1</sup>

After the death of his first wife, Murray tried to run away from his calling as a Universalist preacher, but fate willed otherwise. Landing in New Jersey in 1770, he fell in with a dreamer named Thomas Potter who had grown away from Calvinism and desired something else to take its place. Murray's views just suited him, and he encouraged Murray to begin preaching again. Murray then became an itinerant in a wider and constantly enlarging field reaching from Pennsylvania to New Hampshire in the years from 1770 to 1774. In the latter year he began preaching alternately at Boston and Gloucester where the remainder of his life was to be largely spent.

During the American Revolution Murray was one of the first clergymen to serve as a chaplain, being attached to a Rhode Island regiment. When the orthodox tried to have him removed because of his heterodox views, Washington rebuked his opponents by appointing him to a brigade, which was a promotion.

In October, 1788, he was married to Judith, the widowed daughter of his friend, Winthrop Sargent, and on Christmas day of the same year, "Mr. John Murray was ordained to the pastoral charge of the Independent Church of Christ in Gloucester," the first Universalist church organized in America. Here he preached for nearly twenty years. In 1793, he was installed as minister of the "First Universal Church in Boston" where likewise he preached for a score of years until his death in 1815.

<sup>1</sup>HELL'S RAMPARTS FELL; the biography of John Murray. By Clarence R. Skinner and Alfred S. Cole. Boston: The Universalist Publishing House, 1941. 177 pp. \$1.50. Illustrated.

At Boston, Murray was deeply grieved by the Unitarian tendencies of Ballou and other younger men. He remained Trinitarian but preached God's unbounded, undefeatable love, which he considered sound and scriptural. Further than that he could not go. But before his death, and largely as a result of his labors, Universalism began to be considered an established movement. It was to develop far beyond his teaching.

How shall we estimate the influence of his life? The authors point out very justly the simplicity and honesty of his character. Yet eloquent as he was in his own time, somehow his writings do not stir us today. Though narrow in certain aspects of his theology, he was a man of great breadth of feeling. He dramatized Universalism and thus became the symbol of the whole movement. And finally, his preaching was on the side of history, which has shown that the Calvinism he challenged belonged to the past, while his gospel pointed to the future.

"He cried out not merely against Hell, but against a philosophy which makes cruelty, frustration and despair central to the nature of the Universe. He and his followers gave their fortunes and their lives to the emancipating conviction that at the heart of life there is something decent that makes life worth living." For Murray pointed out that love, not fear or hate, is the law of life.

The authors have given us a clear, eloquent and timely historical narrative of the life and work of a man who has profoundly influenced the religious thought of the modern world.

The First Church of Christ,  
Lancaster, Mass.

FREDERICK L. WEIS.

#### TOWARDS AN UNDERSTANDING OF FRANCE

Chief among the questions that Americans who are thinking about world problems today wish to understand is that of the fall and future of France. There are current many glib answers, by journalists, by Paris trippers, by students of limited aspects of French life or history,—answers that shed little light. A genuinely illuminating book on the subject is *The France of Tomorrow*.<sup>1</sup> The author, Albert Guérard, born and educated in France, a teacher for more than thirty-five years in the United States, knows intimately France and her people; and knows authoritatively, as a profound and life-long student, her culture. He knows America and Americans also, and understands what we seek to understand. The book is written in the sharp and brilliant style that all who read Professor Guérard's "Meditation on the Élite" in the Winter 1940 issue of THE JOURNAL OF LIBERAL RELIGION remember with delight.

This study of the France of tomorrow is a study of Europe's tomorrow also and of the future of the world.

The Meadville Theological School

SYDNEY B. SNOW.

<sup>1</sup>THE FRANCE OF TOMORROW. By Albert Guérard. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1942. 287 pp. \$3.50.